

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 01127 200523Z

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ACTION PM-03

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5103

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

SECDEF

CNO

COMNAVELECSYSCOM

CINCPAC

CINCPACFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1127

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, AS, US

SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR OMEGA STATION IN AUSTRALIA

REF: STATE 9066

1. SUMMARY: OMEGA ISSUE DID NOT RPT NOT COME UP FOR SERIOUS DISCUSSION AT ALP CONFERENCE IN EARLY FEBRUARY, AND WE ARE NO CLOSER TO DECISION. CHARGE DISCUSSED PROSPECTS FOR OMEGA FEB 17 WITH SENATOR WHEELDON (CHAIRMAN OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE TASKED WITH MAKING RECOMMENDATION TO GOVERNMENT). WHEELDON AGREED THAT OMEGA IS NOT PRIMARILY MILITARY SYSTEM. HOWEVER, HE MADE CLEAR HE COULD NOT BACK-TRACK FROM EARLIER OPPOSITION HE HAD EXPRESSED TO IT. WHEELDON SAID DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BEING REWRITTEN AS IT IS TOO LONG AND UNFOCUSED. THIS LOOKS LIKE FURTHER EFFORT TO DELAY DECISION. EMBASSY BELIEVES DEPT. AND WASHINGTON AGENCIES SHOULD NOW CONSIDER CONSEQUENCES OF NO RPT NO DECISION ON OMEGA WHILE LABOR GOVERNMENT IS IN POWER. ACTION REQUESTED: THAT DEPT. AND WASHINGTON AGENCIES
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CANBER 01127 200523Z

REVIEW ISSUE OF WHETHER OMEGA STATION REALLY REQUIRED IN

THIS PART OF WORLD. IF STATION URGENTLY REQUIRED, WE SUGGEST STUDY OF SOME ALTERNATE LOCATION. END SUMMARY.

2. AT LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE FEB 3-7 NO RPT NO DECISION REACHED ON OMEGA, AND ONLY ONE PASSING REFERENCE MADE TO OMEGA IN DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY DISCUSSION. IN VIEW OF SUBSTANTIAL TIME AND EFFORT DEPT, WASHINGTON AGENCIES, AND EMBASSY HAVE LAVISHED ON THIS MATTER, EMBASSY WISHES TO REVIEW PRESENT SITUATION IN SOME DETAIL AS BACKGROUND FOR OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ON NEXT STEP.

3. IN CONVERSATION CHARGE HAD FEB 17 WITH SENATOR WHEELDON (CHAIRMAN OF JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE CHARGED WITH MAKING RECOMMENDATION ON OMEGA STATION CONSTRUCTION) WHEELDON SAID THAT HE WAS NOW PERSONALLY SATISFIED THAT OMEGA WAS NOT A MILITARY SYSTEM AND WAS NOT PRIMARILY DESIGNED FOR MILITARY USE, ALTHOUGH MILITARY AS WELL AS CIVILIAN SHIPS AND PLANES COULD OF COURSE USE IT. NEVERTHELESS, HE WAS STILL OPPOSED TO INSTALLATION OF AN OMEGA STATION IN AUSTRALIA. ON FURTHER QUESTIONING, HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WAS SIMPLY LOCKED IN POLITICALLY; HE COULD NOT BACKTRACK FROM HIS EARLIER OPPOSITION TO OMEGA. CHARGE SUGGESTED THAT WHEELDON MIGHT PRAISE HIS COMMITTEE'S HEARINGS AND INVESTIGATION AS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE USE OF COMMITTEES IN THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, AND THAT HE COULD SAY THAT NEW INFORMATION CAME TO LIGHT DURING THIS REVIEW DEMONSTRATING THAT THE SYSTEM WAS NOT PRIMARILY MILITARY. ALTERNATIVELY, CHARGE SUGGESTED, WHEELDON MIGHT CONSIDER RELEASING A MAJORITY REPORT OF THIS FINDING CONCURRENTLY AND RELEASE A MINORITY OPINION OF HIS OWN EXPRESSING CONTINUING BUT REDUCED CONCERN.

4. AT ONE POINT WHEELDON WONDERED RHETORICALLY HOW ALL THE OPPOSITION TO OMEGA EVER GOT STARTED IN THE FIRST PLACE, SINCE IT WAS, IN THE WORDS CHARGE HAD USED A QTE ELECTRONIC LIGHTHOUSE. END QTE. CHARGE POINTED OUT THAT AUSTRALIAN SHIPPING AND COMMERCE TO AND FROM AUSTRALIA WOULD BE THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES OF AN OMEGA STATION LOCATED SO AS TO COMPLETE COVERAGE IN THIS PART OF THE PACIFIC. CHARGE SAID IT SEEMED PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT THE STATION BE LOCATED IN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CANBER 01127 200523Z

AUSTRALIA. CHARGE ALSO MENTIONED THAT THE OTHER STATIONS IN NORWAY, JAPAN, THE CARIBBEAN, ETC. WERE NEARING COMPLETION, AND, IF THERE WERE TO BE COVERAGE OF BENEFIT TO AUSTRALIA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC, WE WOULD HAVE TO MOVE AHEAD TO PLAN A STATION. AN AUSTRALIAN DECISION WAS INCREASINGLY URGENT. ALTHOUGH WHEELDON WAS QUITE WILLING TO DISCUSS SUCH IDEAS, HE REVERTED TO THE LINE THAT HE WAS TOO COMMITTED POLITICALLY AND HAD NO GRACEFUL WAY TO CHANGE HIS POSITION.

5. WHEELDON SAID COMMITTEE REPORT NOW BEING RE-WRITTEN ON GROUND IT IS TOO WORDY AND UNFOCUSED. HE SAID THIS PROCESS WOULD TAKE TWO MONTHS, AFTER WHICH LABOR PARTY PARLIAMEN- TARY CAUCUS WOULD REVIEW THE QUESTION.

6. DELAY TO DATE IN HANDLING OF OMEGA STATION CONSTRUCTION ISSUE BY JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (WHICH HAS BEEN CON- sidering issue since mid-1973) AND PROSPECT OF FURTHER DELAY SUGGEST NEED TO CONSIDER CONSEQUENCES OF NO RPT NO DECISION ON THIS ISSUE WHILE LABOR GOVERNMENT IS IN POWER IN AUSTRALIA.

7. PARA 2 OF REFTEL STATES THAT CONTINUED INDECISION BY GOA ON AUSTRALIAN OMEGA STATION POSES SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR WORLDWIDE SYSTEM'S INTEGRITY AND MANAGEMENT. UP TO THIS POINT, EMBASSY HAD BEEN UNDER IMPRESSION THAT OMEGA SYSTEM COULD FUNCTION ADEQUATELY IN COVERAGE OF MOST OF WORLD, WITH NO RPT NO EFFECTIVE COVERAGE FOR PORTIONS OF OCEAN AREA NEAR AUSTRALIAN COAST (PARTICULARLY WEST AND SOUTHERN COAST OF AUSTRALIA AND AREAS ADJACENT TO IT). IF THIS IMPRESSION IS CORRECT, NOT RPT NOT CLEAR TO THIS EMBASSY THAT U.S. INTERESTS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY DAMAGED IF AUSTRALIAN OMEGA STATION IS NOT NOW APPROVED.

8. LEFT WING MEMBERS OF THE LABOR PARTY HAVE LONG BEEN OP- POSED TO THE PRESENCE OF U.S. DEFENSE FACILITIES IN AUSTRAL- IA IN TIME OF PEACE. THIS BEING TH CASE, THE WHITLAM GOVERN- MENT IS RELUCTANT TO STIR UP FURTHER DEBATE ON U.S. DEFENSE FACILITIES BY APPROVING CONSTRUCTION OF AN OMEGA STATION HERE. MOST KNOWLEDGABLE AUSTRALIANS ARE AWARE THAT OMEGA CANNOT LOGICALLY BE CLASSIFIED AS A U.S. DEFENSE INSTALLA- TION, AND EVEN SENATOR WHEELDON ADMITS THIS. BUT HE AND OTHERS HAVE SPOKEN AGAINST THE OMEGA FACILITIES AND DO NOTHING TO REBUT THE WILDER ARGUMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE AGAINST CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CANBER 01127 200523Z

IT. SIMPLY PUT, NEITHER WHEELDON NOR OTHER MORE MODERATE MEMBERS OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT WISH TO MOVE AFFIRMATIVELY ON THIS CONTROVERSIAL PROJECT WHICH, IN THEIR VIEW, WOULD BENEFIT AUSTRALIA ONLY SLIGHTLY AND COULD DAMAGE THEM POLIT- ICALLY.

9. UNDER PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE CIRCUMSTANCES, EMBASSY DOES NOT RPT NOT ANTICIPATE DECISION ON OMEGA AS LONG AS SENATOR WHEELDON CAN DELAY MATTER. EVEN IF WHEELDON SOMEHOW FINDS GRACEFUL WAY OF BACKING OUT OF CONTROVERSY (WHICH HE HAS CON- TRIBUTED TO STIMULATING) POSSIBILITY OF BOYCOTT BY LABOR UNIONS OF HANDLING OF OMEGA EQUIPMENT AND PREPARATION OF SITE HAS ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED BY SOME TRADE UNIONS AND WOULD CERTAINLY BE ADVOCATED DIRECTLY BY ALP LEFT ELEMENTS THAT OPPOSE OMEGA, WERE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

TO RECOMMEND CONSTRUCTION OF STATION. FURTHER DELAYS IN STATION CONSTRUCTION WOULD THEN BECOME INEVITABLE.

10. WHILE WE FORESEE NO EARLY ACTION BY THE LABOR GOVERNMENT ON OMEGA STATION IN AUSTRALIA, WE DO NOT RPT NOT WISH TO EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF ULTIMATE ACCEPTANCE OF THIS SYSTEM. WE HAVE ELSEWHERE ASSESSED PROSPECT FOR CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA THROUGH ELECTIONS AS 50-50, OVER NEXT YEAR OR SO. OPPOSITION LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES HAVE NO WELL-DEFINED POSITION ON OMEGA, THOUGH LAST LIBERAL-COUNTRY MINISTER FOR SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT, PETER NIXON. PUBLICALLY ADVOCATED CONSTRUCTION OF OMEGA STATION, AND OFFICIALS OF HIS DEPARTMENT TESTIFIED IN ITS FAVOR AT HEARINGS OF THE JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE. WE BELIEVE THAT LIBERAL-COUNTRY GOVERNMENT WOULD APPROVE CONSTRUCTION OF OMEGA STATION, THOUGH TRADE UNION BOYCOTT REFERRED TO IN PARA 9 WOULD STILL REMAIN REAL POSSIBILITY. NT RPT NOT CLEAR WHETHER LIBERAL-COUNTRY GOVERNMENT WOULD BE PREPARED TO HAVE MAJOR CONFRONTATION ON THIS ISSUE.

11. IN FUTURE YEARS, WHEN OMEGA SYSTEM IS UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED AS PART OF INTERNATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE, A FUTURE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, WHATEVER ITS COMPOSITION, MIGHT WELL ADVOCATE CONSTRUCTING STATION IN THIS COUNTRY TO ENSURE THAT THIS IMPROVED NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM IS FULLY AVAILABLE TO AUSTRALIA. THIS PROSPECT IS TOO FAR INTO THE FUTURE TO AFFECT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 CANBER 01127 200523Z

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS BELOW.

12. ACTION RECOMMENDED: EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT DEPT. AND WASHINGTON AGENCIES 1) CONSIDER WHETHER OMEGA STATION IS REALLY REQUIRED IN THIS PART OF WORLD OR WHETHER SYSTEM CAN FUNCTION ADEQUATELY WITHOUT IT FOR SEVERAL YEARS PENDING SHIFT IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL OUTLOOK, WITH ONLY MINOR DEGRADATION OF SYSTEM INTEGRITY AND COVERAGE; 2) IF OMEGA STATION IN SOUTH PACIFIC IS URGENTLY REQUIRED, SUGGEST WASHINGTON AGENCIES NOW CONSIDER LOCATION ELSEWHERE THAN AUSTRALIA.
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Message Attributes

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